

**Always:**

- Wash hands after cage cleaning and handling the iguana.
- Keep the iguana and its bowls and cage furnishings away from the kitchen and dining areas.
- Disinfect sinks and tubs used to wash the iguana and its cage furnishings.
- Refrain from kissing your iguana.
- Feed fresh, high quality, pesticide-free greens and chopped or grated raw vegetables.
- Offer access to fresh air and sunlight and include a special UVB-generating fluorescent bulb in the enclosure (available from pet stores).
- Follow your veterinarian's recommendations for calcium or vitamin D3 supplements.
- Mist your iguana generously with warm water twice daily using a pump sprayer (spray only when the UVB light is on).

**Housing for your Iguana should:**

- Be as tall as possible, to accommodate a tree-dwelling lifestyle.
- Contain branches for climbing and basking.
- Provide for 12-hour night/day cycles.
- Be free of mirrors and other reflective surfaces.
- Be cleaned regularly.
- Be spacious, secure, safe, and easy to service.
- Contain easily cleaned substrate (using a non-particulate substrate helps keep things clean).

**It Is Important to avoid:**

- Meat or other high protein sources (including dog food, cat food, monkey biscuits, tofu, and insects)
- Feeding "florist" flowers
- Temperatures colder than 75°F (24°C) or hotter than 105°F (40°C)
- "Hot rocks" in the enclosure (the rock may get too hot)
- Sunning the iguana outside in a glass enclosure (it may overheat)
- Free roam of the house (it is difficult to maintain adequate humidity)
- Substrates that are particulate, such as gravel, grit, cat litter, sand, pebbles, artificial grass, or wood chips that may be swallowed
- Toxic fumes from paints, building materials or household cleaners
- Dogs, cats and young children
- Scented sprays

**Additional Reading:**

Herp and Green Iguana Information Collection: [anapsid.org](http://anapsid.org)

Green Iguana Society: [www.greeniguanasociety.org](http://www.greeniguanasociety.org)

Iguana Iguana: Guide for Successful Captive Care, Frederic L. Frye

Green Iguana: The Ultimate Owner's Manual, James W. Hatfield III

The Green Iguana Manual, P. De Vosjoli

Iguanas for Dummies, M. Kaplan

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# COMPANION REPTILE CARE SERIES

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## How to Keep Your Iguana Healthy, Happy and Safe!

This brief guide is intended to provide basic information about iguana care. It is recommended that you contact your local reptile veterinarian for a wellness examination and up-to-date care details.

Iguanas are native to Mexico, Central America, Islands in the Caribbean, and South America. The species most frequently maintained in captivity is the green iguana (*Iguana iguana*), which lives in warm, humid rain forests. As free-ranging adults, they are large lizards, living in trees and eating leaves and blossoms.

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Iguanas have a dragon-like appearance and fascinating demeanor, making them a unique family pet. As youngsters, iguanas may be flighty. With gentle, regular handling, most will learn that humans are not predators and will settle down. As iguanas approach maturity, at around 3 feet (1 m) in length, they may begin to demonstrate seasonal aggression. Both genders can become quite dangerous during this time, with biting, tail-lashing and scratching behaviors. In some males, this aggression may continue throughout the year.

The pet industry is supplied mainly with young animals raised on iguana "farms" in Central America. All reptiles, including iguanas, may be infected with *Salmonella* bacteria, so they are unsuitable pets for very young children and those with compromised immune systems. Good hygiene must always be practiced around pet iguanas. For more information, there is a handout on *Salmonella* Information for Reptile Owners at arav.org.

As soon as an iguana has been acquired, it should be taken to an exotic animal veterinarian for a general health check and a fecal exam for parasites. Visiting your reptile veterinarian for routine health checks will help prevent many diseases and support you in having a long, satisfying relationship with your iguana. For help in finding a reptile veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV) by visiting www.ARIV.org and click on "Find a Vet" or contact the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners by visiting www.ABVP.com/diplomate.

#### Common Disorders of Iguanas

- Metabolic bone disease
- Renal (kidney) disease
- Bone fractures
- Internal parasites
- External parasites (mites)
- Egg stasis
- Male aggression
- Skin infections (bacterial/fungal)
- Tail loss and trauma to toes
- Retained sheds
- Rostral abrasions
- Cloacal prolapse

Green iguanas in captivity have often suffered illness or premature death due to lack of knowledge about their proper care. Contact your veterinarian if you notice reduced growth, poor appetite, depression, dull color, swelling of the bones in the face and legs, loss of weight, regurgitation, fractures, spasms, convulsions, and/or difficulty walking, climbing or chewing food.

#### Is Your Iguana a Male or a Female?

In young iguanas, it may be difficult to visually distinguish a male from a female. Some veterinarians may consider cloacal probing, but the safest, most reliable method is waiting until individuals have matured enough to develop secondary sex characteristics: the male normally has a taller dorsal spine, larger dewlap, larger operculum scales, bilateral hemipenal bulges at the base of the tail, and large, well-developed femoral pores.

#### Diet

Free-ranging green iguanas are herbivores, feeding on plants (leaves, flowers). In captivity, the following may be offered daily:

- A variety of pesticide-free, calcium-rich greens and leaves should comprise about 60-80% of the diet. These include: turnip greens, collard green, mustard greens, dandelion greens, parsley, romaine, escarole, cilantro, mulberry leaves.
- A fiber source, such as chopped grass, alfalfa hay or alfalfa pellets. These may be soaked prior to feeding.
- Other vegetables should comprise about 10-20% of the diet: grated carrot, squash, zucchini, sweet potato, bell pepper, broccoli, peas, beans, okra, sprouts (and mixed salad).
- Fruits should be limited to less than 10% of the diet: banana, papaya, melon, apple, plums, strawberries, tomatoes, grapes, figs, kiwi, berries.
- Treats that may be offered occasionally include: kale, spinach, home-grown rose petals, hibiscus flowers and leaves, dandelion blossoms, and any "edible" flowers.

All foods should be washed, chopped into bite-sized pieces, mixed together, and served at room temperature or slightly warmer. A calcium supplement, such as calcium carbonate, should be sprinkled on the salad every day to every other day. A reptile multivitamin supplement should be sprinkled on the salad every one to two weeks.

#### Feeding schedule:

- Hatchlings (up to 14 inches/35 cm)—every 12 hours.
- Young iguanas (less than 2 feet/61 cm)—daily.
- Mature iguanas (longer than 3 feet/1 m)—every day or every other day.

#### Water and Humidity

Green iguanas need an environment of high humidity to stay healthy (70-80%). They should be provided with a large water container deep enough for the iguana to submerge completely for drinking and swimming. Many iguanas defecate only in their water bowl, so the water needs to be changed daily and after each defecation.

#### Light Exposure

Iguanas need exposure to approximately 12 hours of full spectrum (UVA/UVB) light daily, in addition to a periodic dietary source of vitamin D3, in order to prevent life threatening issues with calcium metabolism. Natural sunlight is the best source of UV B lighting, but there are a variety of commercially available bulbs that provide quality full spectrum UV light for iguanas housed indoors or in low-sunlight climates. Talk to your reptile veterinarian for the best current recommendations in UV bulbs. It is important to note that UVB rays are blocked by glass or plastic.

#### Temperature

Iguanas must have access to a gradient of temperatures within the enclosure, ranging from 75-105F depending on the time of day or night:

- daytime: 85-90°F (29-32°C) ambient
- "daytime basking spot": 95-105°F (35-40°C) in one corner of the enclosure
- nighttime: 75-80°F (24-26°C) ambient

#### Preventive Care

The most important factors in keeping an iguana healthy are diet, water and humidity; gradients of warm temperatures, and access to high quality ultraviolet B light.

#### What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy Green Iguana

- Robust, alert disposition
- Full range of motion of limbs and toes
- Absence of lumps, bumps or evidence of fractures
- Smooth jawline with closed mouth
- Bright coloring

IGUANA

